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Testimony on: *“Logs in the Road: Eliminating Federal Red Tape and Excessive Litigation to Create Healthy Forests, Jobs and Abundant Water and Power Supplies”*
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Congressmen, thank you for this opportunity to testify.

My name is Leigh Robertson, and I represent Uncompahgre Com, a nonprofit that promotes forest health in ways that provide positive impacts on local economic, cultural and ecological values. We are also a partner in the Western Colorado Landscape Collaborative, along with local offices of the Forest Service, Bureau of Land Management, Colorado Parks and Wildlife, Western Area Power Administration and Tri-State Generation and Transmission Association.

Our local collaborative is working hard to improve the resiliency of our forests, and I would like to share some information about this valuable model.

To give an example, in July of 2002 the Burn Canyon Fire charred over 30,000 acres. The Forest Service made plans for a salvage logging sale in the canyon after the fire. Environmental groups were concerned about the potential for ecological damage from logging operations. By discussing the issues and working together, various interested parties were able to come up with a win-win solution. This included developing a multi-party monitoring partnership to determine the impacts of salvage logging and preventing one timber sale located on steep land that would have required the construction of new roads. This stopped appeals by environmental groups of two other timber sales within the canyon and helped two small, local timber companies stay in business. As a result, harvesting and processing of wood products resulted in an estimated return of over \$1,460,000. In addition, logging, trucking and sawmill businesses spent over \$770,000 in the region for goods and services.

Another example is the Uncompahgre Plateau Collaborative Forest Landscape Restoration Program (CFLRP). By involving local stakeholders early on in the planning process, environmental concerns were addressed, and there were no appeals of the NEPA document which has resulted in several Stewardship contracts. This Environmental Assessment has led to over 29,000 ccf of timber to local mills and has provided 229 part and full-time jobs.

In addition, we've worked with partners such as the WAPA and Tri-State when planning forest treatments. This has resulted in larger and more effective treatments that reduce the likelihood of wildfires destroying power lines and the associated disruption of power to thousands of people, property damage, and possible loss of human life. These treatments also improve wildlife habitat and forest diversity. So far, over 2,000 acres of power line treatments have been accomplished.

Currently, the Forest Service and local partners are planning for the next phase of the CFLR project. The NEPA document for the Escalante Project Area will cover approximately 142,000 acres. There are a number of benefits to planning for large landscapes such as this:

- The ability to implement many forest treatments under one NEPA document, which provides for greater efficiency and coordination
- Wildlife, recreation, industry and environmental concerns can all be effectively discussed and resolved up front with stakeholders
- The more profitable treatments, such as logging of spruce trees, can help offset the costs of ecosystem restoration treatments, such as the thinning of small diameter pine trees—which are not profitable to log commercially
- Money can be leveraged among several partners, and
- Projects can be planned to keep naturally-ignited fires compartmentalized between treated areas and existing roads.

While we have been able to work successfully within existing environmental regulations, we do see other areas that could be improved. These improvements could include:

- Getting federal budgets to the local field offices before the end of the current fiscal year.
- Increasing the authority of local land managers to move on projects and to collaborate with other partners,
- and other items mentioned in my written testimony.

We would encourage Congress to keep supporting collaboration, such as through continued funding for the Collaborative Forest Landscape Restoration Program. The CFLR Program not only encourages local stakeholder involvement, but also promotes sharing of knowledge among the various projects across the U.S., which improves efficiency.

Thank you for your consideration of this testimony.

Further suggestions for things that could be improved:

- Currently, collaborators can only request federal funds 30 days before they will be used. It can be very hard to predict when funds will be needed due to factors such as weather and contractor's schedules. It would be helpful if the local forest supervisor had the ability to extend that time up to 90 days.
- Ongoing changes in policies and new regulations can have a dramatic effect on local offices—reducing efficiencies, morale and employee production.
- The Forest Service often values timber too high, which can prevent local contractors from bidding on timber sales. It makes more sense to listen to the local timber industry reps and see what price is economically feasible. If the Forest Service keeps the valuation a little lower, industry contractors can bid up the price.
- The recently added additional layer in the state BLM organization causes less efficiency and hinders local managers in moving effectively to meet their land management objectives. We'd rather see that money going to add more field-level employees.

- Additional regulations imposed on collaborators (in formal participating agreements) increase costs for these organizations. This makes it very challenging in this economy.

Other Comments:

- We don't see any need to circumvent the NEPA process. Logging of beetle-killed trees could have detrimental environmental affects in some areas, so the process provides necessary safeguards. If planning efforts include stakeholders in the early stages, appeals can often be prevented.
- The collaborative approach mentioned above, e.g., involving stakeholders and working across large landscapes is also effective in other areas, such as coordinated weed management and the Colorado Plateau-wide native plant program.
- In addition to the Forest Service, the BLM has been an important partner in this process, e.g., many power line treatments were conducted on BLM land.
- Another critical component of our success has been the use of the various funding sources in implementing programs across agency boundaries to benefit our broad landscape approach to healthy public lands.
- We applaud your efforts to get out to local communities to hear the issues of concern, since each locale has their own specific challenges. As you can see, the need to log beetle-killed pine to improve forest health isn't an issue on the Uncompahgre Plateau. Here, pine trees aren't even a species that local loggers and mills want to buy. Spruce is the tree that is economically feasible to log and mill. That said, we are doing all we can to:
 - improve forest resiliency to minimize future outbreaks of insect infestations and reduce the likelihood of catastrophic wildfires, and
 - provide local jobs, recreational opportunities, and move towards ecosystem health in a collaborative, science-based manner.

We encourage Congress to continue supporting this effective approach.